

When your child is in pain

What is pain?

Pain is an unpleasant feeling usually brought on by injury, disease or infection. There can be other causes and sometimes there are no visible signs (such as a headache).

While most children with a minor injury respond to reassuring words, a hug or a Band Aid®, a child's pain can serve as a useful warning of a potentially serious injury or illness.

The first step in managing any child's pain is to find out how much it hurts and where the pain is.

How to deal with a child's pain

The best way to find out how much pain your child has is to ask them and watch them. What does your child say about their pain? What is your child doing? How is their body reacting? Ask if they are okay or if they need something to make the pain better.

Look at the pattern of your child's pain and be aware of your child's behaviour and answers, which will tell you if they need help with their pain. Even very young children can say where their pain is and if it is a little pain or a big pain.

Pain is very distressing and if not treated can cause your child to become anxious. If your child is in pain it is important to use medicines and also distractions such as blowing bubbles, slow breathing, music and stories. These will help your child cope.

If you are taking your child to the doctor, it is okay to give them a simple pain medicine such as paracetamol before you go. Your child does not need to be in pain for a medical examination.

Treatment

Medicines that relieve pain are known as analgesics. Some are available in supermarkets and some can be purchased in pharmacies without a doctor's prescription.

There are two main treatments available without prescription: paracetamol and ibuprofen. Always follow directions on the labels and never give more than the recommended dose, as this can cause serious side-effects.

Paracetamol, also known as Panadol®, Dymadon® and Panamax®, is suitable for mild pain. It is safe and effective when taken as directed on the label. Never give more than recommended.

Never guess the dose. Always read the label before measuring the dose and always use a proper measuring device. Liquid paracetamol for children comes in different strengths for different

ages so be sure to use the right dose for your child's age and weight.

Be careful not to give more than one medicine containing paracetamol. Some medicines for coughs, colds and sinus congestion include paracetamol. When paracetamol is in a medicine, it will be written on the label.

Ibuprofen, also known as Nurofen®, is an anti-inflammatory analgesic. It can be used as an additional pain medicine, especially if the pain is caused by swelling.

It must not be given to infants under six months of age.

Always give the right dose for your child's age and weight and use a proper measuring device.

Ibuprofen can cause side-effects such as feeling sick (nausea) and tummy (abdominal) pain. It is best taken with food.

A pain-management plan

Paracetamol

- Check dose on label and give every 4-6 hours regularly
- Maximum 4 doses per day

If pain is not relieved by paracetamol add or change to:

Ibuprofen

- Check dose on label and give every 6-8 hours
- Best to be given with food usually three doses per day

Safety

At home, always keep medicines in a safe place away from children.

Follow-up

If pain continues or is not helped by medicine please return to Cabrini ED for further medical review.

Seeking help

Cabrini Emergency Department (ED) is staffed by experienced emergency doctors and nurses 24 hours a day, 7 days per week. If you have any questions about your ED treatment our qualified ED staff can be contacted on **(03) 9508 1500** at any time. If you need to return to Cabrini ED for ongoing care we would be glad to take care of you again and if this occurs within a week of your initial consultation the doctor's fee will be bulk-billed.

PATIENT INFORMATION

You can also expect to receive a phone call or SMS message from one of our emergency nurses the day after you have been discharged. The nurse will be able to clarify any aspect of your diagnosis, treatment, or follow-up.

In a medical emergency return to Cabrini ED if it is safe to do so or go to the nearest hospital emergency department or call an ambulance – dial triple zero (000).

You need to seek medical review if:

- **Pain medicines are not working**
- **You are becoming more worried**
- **Your child looks unwell**
- **Your child has a fever and rash**
- **Your child is drowsy or irritable**
- **Your child has difficulty walking**

Want to know more?

- Contact Cabrini ED on **(03) 9508 1500**
- Ask your local doctor or healthcare professional
- Visit the Royal Children's Hospital website www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Pain_relief_for_children/
- Visit the Better Health Channel www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au